

Sermon Text for July 26, 2020

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Isaiah 6:1-8, Matthew 6:9-13

“Hallowed be thy name”

Good morning First Presbyterian. It has been a while since I have been able to ask you, but how are you doing? What we are going through together is impacting us all in so many various ways. I think of our teachers in this church as they are getting ready for the fall and still not knowing what it is going to look like. I think of our young families as they get their kids ready for school, but they still don't know what that is going to look like. I think of those of you who have been laid off and one month has led to more. I think of those of you who are retired and were planning activities and trips and living out your retirement to the fullest extent possible and here you are at home. I think of our farmers who continue to put food on our tables even as production lines are shutting down. I think of our first responders as they deal with the upheaval and the unrest in our society. This has been a different and a difficult time for all of us, and it continues.

So how are you doing? I have been reminded lately of how important it is during this time to maintain our witness and our testimony to Jesus Christ and how what we say and what we do has an impact on how people view our Savior. What we say and what we do has a direct impact upon the one that we call our Savior. That has never been a real problem in the past for me. I haven't felt like I have had to say one thing and then be careful in how I live, I like living the way I do, I like following Jesus' commandments as much as I can to my ability. But now I have to be more careful because if I say that we are not going to open the sanctuary for worship but then I gather with a group from the church or I travel to Florida, well, that can be seen as hypocrisy. So I have to be more careful in what I do and what I say during this time.

A few weeks ago a member of our community was offended by an interaction that he had with me and as a result broke all ties with the church. I was not aware of what I had said or what I had done had in any way impacted him the way that it did until I was told by another member of the church. In these times we have to be especially careful knowing that all of us are facing difficulties and challenges that we have never faced before in our life so our normal way of doing things just may not cut it any longer.

Our actions reflect directly on who we are, our reputation, our legacy, our good name. It only takes on misstep and for the rest of your life it is how you can be identified if you are not careful. It is interesting how we make associations with names and how we have already created

understanding of certain people just by their names. If I were to say Abraham Lincoln then most of you listening would have a concept of who that person is and what they represent. The same if I were to say Adolf Hitler, you would have a reaction to that name based upon what you know. If I were to say Mother Theresa you would have a clear association and like the other names it would elicit strong feelings.

The name of God in both of our Scriptures carries a weight to it that we saw two weeks ago when we looked at Father, Pater, Abba, Daddy, which is very different from what we saw then. Today we see the name of God carries a weight to it, an awesomeness, a sense of totally other as Karl Barth would say which does not conflict or contradict the approachability of God, but does add a sense of awe and power which you may not find in the term Daddy. What we will see today is that if we lose that sense of awe then we run the danger of serving a weak and impotent God who is just our friend. Today we need a God, especially today, who is merciful, yes, kind, yes, faithful, yes, but one who is all powerful especially and is always in control. That is what we find. Let's read.

READ SCRIPTURE

So not long ago we saw the calling of Isaiah and how he was sent off to really preach a message of calamity to the people of Israel. We find those verses after the ones that we read. Today we look in Isaiah at the pre-calling which sets up God as the one who is doing the calling, and what a God it is that we see. We find the overwhelming holiness of God is emphasized in this Scripture. Look at vs.3 and you see how he is described: Holy, Holy, Holy, hallowed is his name. We find a scene where the awesomeness of God is depicted without any holds barred. Did you notice that we also find the first case of face coverings in Scripture. Look at vs.2..., too soon?

We find without a doubt here the majesty and the royalty and the power of God is absolutely highlighted. We find a similar emphasis in Deuteronomy 12:8-11 where the people of Israel are commanded to live a certain life which would then pave the way for the name of God to reside among them in the temple of Jerusalem. God's name, if it is to reside among us, must be within a context where he is proclaimed all powerful and our lives reflect a dependency upon the name of God.

When did Jesus become more than just a name to you? If we say that we believe in God, that is one thing, if we say we believe God, that is something altogether different. We find the name of Jesus associated with a holiness all throughout the New Testament. Look at Mark 1:24 at the beginning of that Gospel we see a man possessed by an unclean spirit who says...Again in

John 6:69 Peter says to Jesus: We have come to know and to believe that you are the holy one of God.

So, absolutely God is approachable, God is our Daddy, what a friend we have in Jesus, but God is holy and that approachability is never compromised by his holiness. The power of God is also never compromised by his availability. What we believe is that while Jesus lived in the midst of the world in which we find ourselves, even though he was immersed in the sin of the world, this is key, look at Hebrews 4:15-16. Jesus being unblemished in such a time as this provides us with mercy and the grace to help in this time of need.

So when Jesus teaches his disciples today our next phrase in the Lord's Prayer, hallowed be thy name, what does this term hallowed mean? We have been looking at the term all along now of holy. Hallowed can simply mean, may your name be made holy. Our Father, who art in heaven, may your name be made holy. But who is in a position to make God's name holy? Who is it who can live their lives in a way that God's name would then be made holy? Augustine and Cyprian, some of the earliest church fathers, remind us that it is not a question of whether or not God's name in itself is hallowed, is holy, that is a fact. The question is whether God's name is made holy in us, and that thereby the world understands by seeing us the holiness of God's name.

What we are to understand is that the hallowing of our heavenly Father's name is to be our highest priority. There is nothing more important in our lives today than to ensure that in our lives we are making God's name holy since by association we are seen as a witness and a representative for our God. We can never forget that. Not when we are interaction with a member of a community that might be offended by what we say. Not when we are posting on social media. Not when we are taking stances that could potentially put other people in danger and so thereby forgetting the greatest commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves.

The way we live our lives reflects whether or not God's name is being hallowed. The way we live our lives has an impact on whether or not we are reflecting the holiness of God in our lives. So what does it mean to not hallow God's name? By not living up to what God calls us to do or say. When we steal, cheat on our marriage, or our income taxes, or put others down we are smudging the good name of God, who sacrificed everything for us that we might have life. How we interact with others during this pandemic, during this election season, is a reflection of how we are making God's name holy.

So how are you doing? It does seem like things have gotten a little more difficult around us. When we are under pressure it is a little more difficult to keep God's name holy, but we

must. When we pray hallowed be thy name it means we accept each day as a precious gift from God. Every person we meet, even the most troublesome ones, who teach us humility and patience, suddenly become a present from God.

Let me talk to my First Presbyterian family for a moment. If you turn to I Peter 2:9 we find the author say the following: You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of the darkness into his marvelous light. We are a holy nation, and I don't mean the United States, I mean First Presbyterian and all those who call themselves the bride of Christ, especially in this time.

We follow one whom God highly exalted, and who was given the name above all names, so that at the name of Jesus, that precious holy name, every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Our task, is in our lives, to make God's name holy. Amen.